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SUBJECT: HIGH COMMISSIONER GUTERRES BRIEFS AMBASSADOR ON  
UNHCR PLANS FOR IRAQ

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) November 25, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres met with the Ambassador to discuss UNHCR's assessment of refugee returns to Iraq, the plight of internally displaced persons and the UN's plan to increase activities countrywide. High Commissioner Guterres announced the United Nation's intentions to double its 2009 budget for activities in Iraq and open offices in four additional provinces (Note: Currently, the UN has offices in 10 of Iraq's 18 provinces. End note). UNHCR will continue to focus on outreach to the Iraqi refugee community abroad and work with the Ministry of Displacement and Migration to build capacity.

¶2. (C) United Nations High Commissioner (HC) Guterres, UNHCR Middle East-North Africa (MENA) Director Radhouane Nouicer, UN Special Representative of the Secretary General (UN SRSG) Staffan de Mistura met with Ambassador Crocker, General Odierno and Pol-Mil MinCouns Corbin. HC Guterres traveled to Iraq November 24-27. In addition to visiting with UN staff and GOI leaders, the HC's delegation traveled to Anbar and Najaf and met with provincial councils, Governors and other community leaders.

¶3. (C) HC Guterres characterized the UN's approach to Iraq as determined, but with no illusions. The UN is represented in 10 of Iraq's 18 provinces with plans to expand to 14 in ¶2009. The UN's budget for activities in Iraq will double next year. Guterres does not expect the Government of Iraq (GOI) to adopt a proactive approach towards refugee returns, as he believes that the Prime Minister views refugees as enemies of the state, Sunnis who supported Saddam. He characterized the Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) as ineffective and the process for refugee returns as cumbersome. Property restitution is a primary concern for refugees and the MoDM seems ill equipped to handle a large influx of refugees. In this regard, work with the MoDM must focus on capacity building. The UN hopes to achieve this with continued cooperation and support from NGOs and the U.S. Mission in Iraq.

¶4. (C) On the topic of internally displaced persons (IDPs), the UN is working with MoDM to build capacity through returnee processing centers. The Ambassador emphasized that the returnee process in Iraq begins with those internally displaced. General Odierno added that UN efforts with IDPs will provide a much needed understanding about IDPs and their needs. Next, the Ambassador welcomed the UN's willingness to work with the Iraqi Army (IA) in those instances when the IA takes on responsibilities for IDP returns. The IA's readiness to take on a humanitarian role is welcome sign and demonstrates a fundamental break from the past.

¶5. (C) HC Guterres spoke of the difficulties UNHCR is encountering with some EU member states hosting Iraqi refugees. Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands are facing increased domestic pressure to forcefully return Iraqi refugees. Proponents of sending Iraqi refugees back to Iraq argue that improvement in security justifies rescinding

asylum status. Guterres is strongly opposed to this as he does not believe that this is the time for mass returns. HC Guterres took the opportunity to express his thanks to the United States for its support of refugees in Iraq as well as those people wishing to emigrate to the U.S.. UNHCR Middle East and North Africa Director, Radhouane Nouicer made special mention of the Ambassador's efforts pertaining to the Palestinian refugees in Iraq.

16. (C) The HC confirmed the Ambassador's thanks for the Q6. (C) The HC confirmed the Ambassador's thanks for the UNHCR's willingness to be supportive in dealing with the GOI in addressing the issues of the residents of Camp Ashraf ) Mujahedin e-Khalq (MEK). HC Guterres stated that the MEK is a problem that the GOI inherited from the previous regime and with no single solution. He said that the UNHCR will be "flexible" in dealing with applicants for refugee status who leave the Camp and will work with GOI to help it approach the issue in an internationally acceptable manner. The Ambassador noted that the GOI was taking responsibility for defectors from Camp Ashraf. Noucier asked how we were caring for defectors who choose to leave the camp before they were transferred to the GOI. Pol-Mil MinCouns explained that a temporary location had been set aside in the MNF-I military camp for small numbers of defectors to be cared for before being transferred.

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